DOCUMENT RESUME

FL 000 998

ED 025 176

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Modern Foreign Languages for the Racially Disadvantaged.
National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association.
Pub Date Mar 68
Note- 3p.
Journal Cit- The Modern Language Journal; v52 n3 p139-40 Mar 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
Descriptors- Audiolingual Methods, *Communication Skills, *Disadvantaged Youth, *Educational Objectives, Language Handicaps, Language Instruction, Language Skills, Modern Languages, Nonstandard Dialects, Oral Communication, Secondary Schools, *Second Language Learning, Student Attitudes, Teaching Skills, *Teaching Techniques

The view of some educational theorists that disadvantaged children with nonstandard English patterns have little to gain from the study of a second language is challenged. Rather, the study of a foreign language, with emphasis on communication and an audiolingual approach, is considered potentially beneficial for such students since the language class ideally is given in the second language. Ways in which modern teaching methods in language classes reinforce successful methods of teaching the disadvantaged are identified. (AF)

ED025176

The Modern Language Journal

ED025176

Volume LII MARCH • 1968 Number 3

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Published by

The National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations

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Modern Foreign Languages for the Racially Disadvantaged

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NATIONAL attention and concern are focused on ways and means to provide the socially disadvantaged child with educational experiences which will allow him to derive maximum benefit for himself and for society. He has been identified and his background probed for causes of his failure to benefit from traditional educational methods. The growing numbers of Negro youth in the urban schools are cause for special emphasis on the problems of this minority group. The strengths of the disadvantaged youth have been pinpointed. Verbal unskillfulness and inferior auditory discrimination have been isolated as major deficiencies, in addition to a lack of positive self-esteem on the part of the racially disadvantaged. The need for improving the conditions for learning at the pre-school and elementary levels is commonly recognized. Until effective programs at these levels are devised and put into widespread use, however, disadvantaged youth will continue to enter the secondary school with weaknesses that block his progress.

These weaknesses and the difficulties encountered by the schools in attempts to improve the usage and understanding of standard English by the disadvantaged have led those studying the problem to decry the introduction of a foreign language into the program of studies of the disadvantaged. Dr. Conant asserts that "foreign languages in grade 7 or grade 8 (recommendations in my junior high school report) have little place in a school in which half the pupils read at the fourth grade level or below."[1] David Ausubel, from a psychologist's viewpoint, repeats this conviction: "In many urban high schools today, pupils who cannot read at a fifth grade level, and who cannot speak or write grammatically or do simple arithmetical calculations, are subject to irregular French verbs, Shakespearean drama, and geometrical theorems. Nothing more educationally futile or better calculated to destroy educational morale could be imagined!"[2]

My experience as a teacher of French to secondary students before and during the transition to new methods in foreign language teaching convinces me that there are many benefits in modern foreign language study for the disadvantaged, including a heightening of educational morale. In my supervision of student teachers using the new materials and methods of foreign language teaching in junior high schools in depressed areas I see these benefits increased. Study of a modern foreign language, taught by the new method with the goal of communication, can be very effective in helping to develop in the disadvantaged a more positive attitude toward himself and school.

Belief that there are benefits in foreign language study for all pupils is expressed in the 1959 recommendation by the National Association of Secondary-School Principals: "Election of modern foreign language study should be open to all interested students. We believe that modern language has appeal and value for secondary-school students when the initial approach emphasizes hearing and speaking."[3] There is a strong tendency, however, on the part of counselors and foreign language teachers to admit to a foreign language class only those pupils who have demonstrated success in other academic subjects. This may be the result of a lack of understanding of the new goals and method of teaching foreign languages, as well as an effort to protect the student from apparently certain failure. My observations have been that a failing grade in a foreign language

[1] James B. Conant, *Slums and Suburbs*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961, p. 22.

[2] David Ausubel and Pearl Ausubel, "Ego Development Among Segregated Negro Children," in *Education in Depressed Areas*, A. Harry Passow (editor), New York: Teachers College Press, 1963, p. 133.

[3] "Modern Foreign Languages in the Comprehensive Secondary School," *The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals*, Vol. XLIII, No. 248 (September, 1959), p. 6.

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course rarely indicated complete lack of accomplishment.

If in the "traditional" course the student floundered in his conjugations or translations, or failed to make satisfactory progress in relation to the goals of the course, he was pleased and encouraged by his ability to understand and to speak the language to the extent that the opportunity was provided. His effective participation in skits and short plays in the foreign language were more meaningful to him than a failing grade in the course. "That's all right if you fail me. I still like French" was a comment typical of the disadvantaged youth's reaction to a reading-oriented French course. His personal evaluation of his ability to succeed in language learning was more meaningful than the academic rating. He had discovered that, given the opportunity, he could learn to communicate in a foreign language as well as the foreigners whom he heard speaking English with difficulty, or as well as the servicemen returned from duty overseas.

For the disadvantaged a present-day modern foreign language course with emphasis on language for communication offers advantages which are not present in other classes: 1) With English limited to a minimum, the deficiencies of his English speech habits are not cause for disparagement and do not present a barrier to understanding and learning; 2) the foreign language is presented to him sequentially; he is guided to acceptable performance at each step; 3) he is given practice to develop the ability to discriminate between sounds; 4) from the first day he is exposed to meaningful use of the foreign language and can experience pride in personal achievement.

The techniques used to develop skills of communication in the foreign language offer the disadvantaged youth the opportunity to achieve his highest potential in classroom language learning. Activities of the modern class in foreign languages, such as those presented here, compare favorably with methods for teaching the disadvantaged child that are suggested in recent literature on the subject. Choral recitation allows the student to practice and improve without embarrassment or fear of ridicule until he has gained enough self-confidence to be willing to recite alone. The pupil hears again and again the material to be mastered. He is led to hear and correct his own errors in oral performance. Frequent review of learned materials makes progress visible to the pupil and allows him to experience pride in accomplishment. The beginning language learner is guided to read and to write correctly the material he has learned to say. The dialogues that he memorizes are based on informal situations with which he can identify. The variety of activities in a foreign language class and constant pupil participation limit opportunities for disorder. The teacher can make maximum use of the class period to further pupil learning.

The skills and attitude of the teacher determine whether the disadvantaged derive maximum value from their study of a foreign language. Like all foreign language teachers, the teacher of disadvantaged youth must be secure in his knowledge and use of the foreign language. He must be skillful in the use of modern techniques of teaching modern foreign languages. In addition to recognizing each pupil as an individual, the teacher must have confidence in the ability of the pupils to learn to speak and understand the foreign language and expect them to make continued progress. It is necessary for him to recognize the need in the United States today for persons with a limited knowledge of a foreign language in a wide variety of occupations.

School administrative personnel, as well as teachers of modern foreign languages, can ensure the benefits of foreign language learning to the disadvantaged if they keep in mind this statement by Ilo Remer of the United States Office of Education: "Adaptation of language teaching to the interest, maturity, and psychological needs of students should not be confused with a lowering of achievement standards."[4] Study of a modern foreign language is of value to the disadvantaged as it is for all pupils. To the racially disadvantaged it offers personal satisfaction in learning and a needed opportunity for pride in accomplishment.

[4] *A Handbook for Guiding Students in Modern Foreign Languages*, Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1963, p. 11.